

SURE, IT'S A CAPABLE RACE MACHINE, BUT IT'S ALSO A SURPRISINGLY COMFORTABLE BIKE FOR ALL-DAY EPICS WHERE YOU'RE NOT SURE WHERE THE ROAD, OR TRAIL, WILL TAKE YOU

BH RX1

I'm not sure what it is about racing bikes with skinny tires in bad weather that makes this sport fun, but there's something special about cyclocross. To me, 'cross is the proving ground for all disciplines of bicycle racing: the raw power of roadies pitched against the bike handling skills of mountain bikers in an hour-long, knock-down, drag-out fight. Not long ago, 'cross was the redheaded stepchild of cycling—an esoteric niche sport, with bikes cobbled together from discarded road and mountain components, often bolted on old touring frames. Today, cyclocross is the fastest growing discipline of competitive cycling. This surge in popularity has been accompanied by the development of some tricked-out race rigs.

THE BIKE

One of the new breed of carbon 'cross bikes is the BH RX1. BH, short for Beistegui Hermanos, is named after the three Beistegui brothers who began building high performance road bikes in the Basque region of Spain over 100 years ago. The company has carried much of the technology from their road line over to the knobby-tired RX1. A carbon monocoque frame with a BB30 bottom bracket is paired with a full carbon fork featuring a tapered steerer. The rear brake and both shift cables are routed through the top tube, giving the frame a very clean appearance while minimizing exposure to the muck and mire synonymous with 'cross racing.

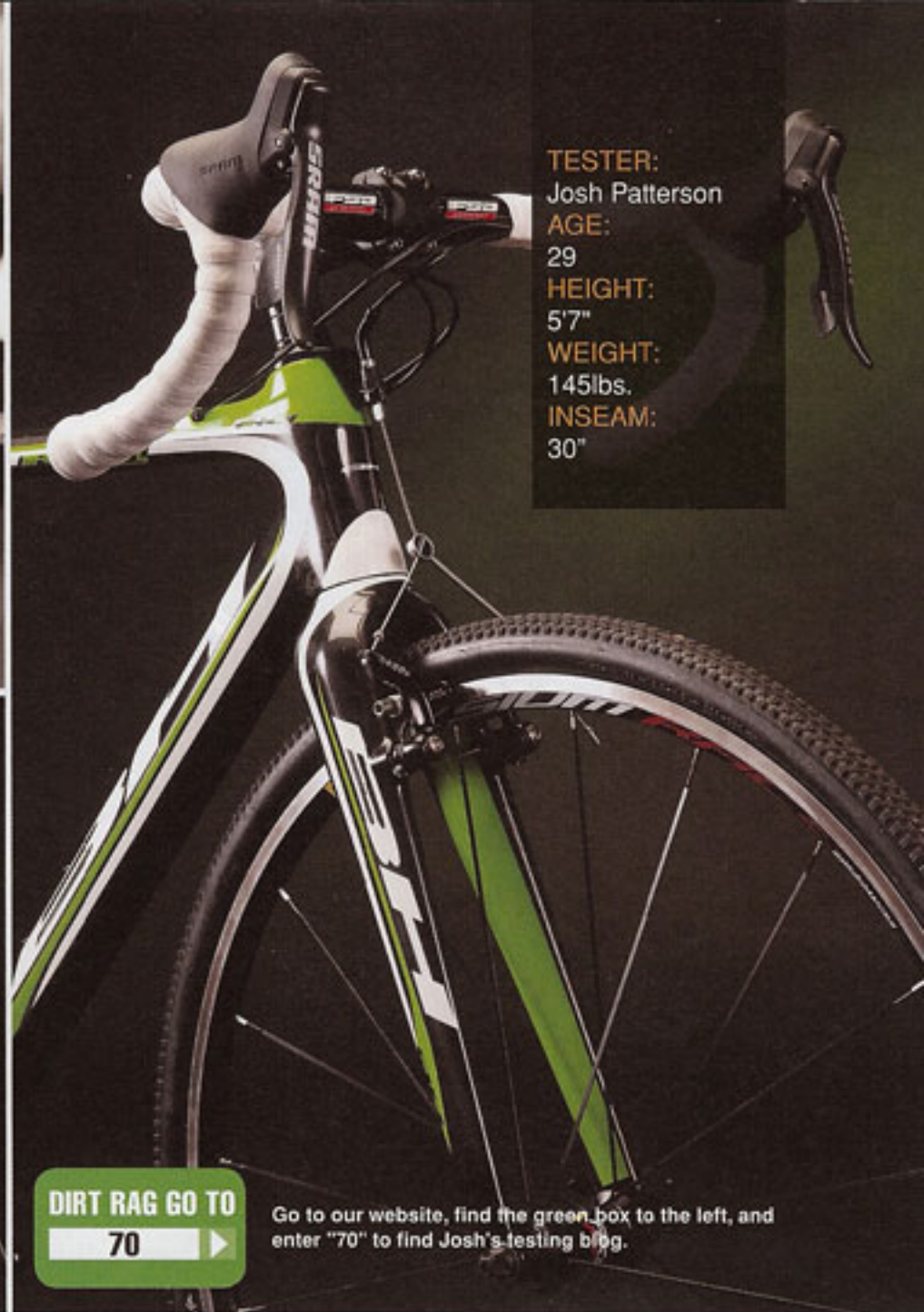
The RX1 was developed with input from European cyclocross racers. Not surprisingly, the geometry reflects the differences between European and North American 'cross tastes: specifically, bottom bracket height and head angle. "Euro-cross" geometry is typified by steeper head angles and higher bottom brackets than those found on their North American counterparts. Compared to my personal 'cross bikes, the 54cm RX1's head angle was 1.3°

steeper, at 72.3°, and the bottom bracket was a full centimeter higher, giving only 60mm of bottom bracket drop. There are pros and cons to high and low bottom brackets on 'cross bikes: lower BBs can increase stability and the feeling of riding in, rather than on top of the bike; a higher BB can allow riders to pedal through muddy turns and off-camber sections without fear of catching a pedal. One is not necessarily better than the other; if you're in the market for a cyclocross bike, I recommend test-riding bikes on opposite ends of the spectrum to see which you prefer.

The drivetrain consists of SRAM Rival Doubletap levers and derailleurs, along with an FSA Gossamer crankset with a 'cross-specific gearing of 46/36t. FSA's Wing Pro handlebar is a staple on the 'cross scene, and for good reason; the shallow, but long drops are easy to grasp when reaching around and under the down tube to shoulder the bike during long run-ups. The Mavic Askium wheelset tips the scales at 1790g, not super-light, but they proved to be a sturdy set of hoops for everyday riding. Weight weenies looking for a performance upgrade could shave off a pound of rotating weight by swapping the stock wheelset for a set of tubulars. For my needs and fitness level, the stock wheels and tires proved more than adequate. Much like the mountain bike version, the fast-rolling 700x35c Kenda Small Block Eight tires proved more versatile than looks suggest.

TRIAL BY FIRE

My first ride aboard the RX1—literally, the first time I clipped and rode it—was a 62-mile sadistic perversion of a cyclocross race known as Iron Cross. The route was equal parts pavement, washed-out fireroads and rock and root-covered singletrack. In hindsight, this dumb decision turned out to be a great demonstration of how versatile a 'cross bike can be—even if



TESTER:
Josh Patterson
AGE:
29
HEIGHT:
5'7"
WEIGHT:
145lbs.
INSEAM:
30"

DIRT RAG GO TO
70

Go to our website, find the green box to the left, and enter "70" to find Josh's testing blog.

you never use a cyclocross bike for cyclocross, they can capably handle a wide range of terrain.

The RXi performed admirably through each section of the course. On this occasion I appreciated the high BB; it allowed me to clear logs and ride through rock gardens without pedal strikes. When I crossed the finish line five hours later I was tired, but not beat up. Allow me to hop on my soapbox for a brief moment: I feel that ride quality has become an afterthought in the race towards lighter, stiffer, carbon frames. I've thrown a leg over many high-end carbon 'cross bikes that beat the living hell out of my back and shoulders. There's enough suffering in a 'cross race as it is! The RXi is plenty stiff, the BB30 bottom bracket and tapered head tube do their job well, and the bike holds a line like a champ. But what impressed me was how well the RXi rode on rutted-out racecourses. The frame has enough compliance to absorb trail chatter, rather than breaking traction and skittering around corners.

I did appreciate the bike's front-end stiffness. Brake shudder, the bane of cantilever brakes—caused by the fore-and-aft flex of the fork and steerer tube under hard braking—was non-existent on the RXi. The 1.5" tapered steerer and wide fork legs worked together to resist flex. The fork has decent mud clearance, but, unlike many other 'cross forks, it does not have recesses for the brake's pads to rest on when disconnected. This required me to muscle inflated tires through the brakes when swapping wheels. According to BH, the brake recesses were intentionally omitted in order to build a stronger, flex-resistant fork.

During traditional hour-long 'cross races, the differences in geometry between my personal bikes and the RXi test bike became very apparent. The high BB and steeper geometry required me to be more attentive when

navigating off-camber turns and hairpins. Once I adjusted my riding style from point-and-shoot to a more finessed approach, easing into corners and letting the bike do the work for me, we began to get along better, though handling was never as confidence-inspiring as the long and low 'cross bikes I'm accustomed to. The only drawback to the RXi that was not a matter of personal preference has to do with mud clearance. The box-shaped junction formed by the bottom bracket shell and chainstays is prone to collecting grass and mud. After one particularly nasty race I found myself digging out a fist-sized lump of terra firma from between the chainstays.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The RXi is more than a one-trick pony. Sure, it's a capable race machine, but it's also a surprisingly comfortable bike for all-day epics where you're not sure where the road, or trail, will take you. In addition to racing, I used the RXi for commuting, gravel road riding, and took it on mellow single-track adventures. Despite having to adjust my riding style to work with the bike's geometry, I came away impressed. If you're a weekend warrior in need of a capable race bike that will pull double-duty as your road or adventure bike, the RXi should be on your shortlist.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: Taiwan
PRICE: \$3000
WEIGHT: 17.88lbs. w/o pedals
SIZES AVAILABLE: 52, 54 (tested), 56, 57cm
CONTACT: www.bhbikes-us.com